

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

DEGRADATION DIAGNOSTIC METHOD, DEGRADATION DIAGNOSTIC
MEDIATION DEVICE AND DEGRADATION DIAGNOSTIC DEVICE AND
5 COMPUTER-READABLE RECORDING MEDIUM ON WHICH A PROGRAM IS
RECORDED.

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims benefit of priority to Japanese
10 Application No. JP 2001 - 2848 filed January 10, 2001, the
entire content of which is incorporated by reference herein.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

15 The present invention relates to a degradation
diagnostic method that executes degradation diagnosis (for
example, life diagnosis etc.) of various types of equipment
(including, for example, installations such as plants, or
electrical or electronic equipment etc.), a degradation
20 diagnostic mediation device and degradation diagnostic
device and computer-readable recording medium on which a
program is recorded.

2. Description of the Related Art

25 For example, when examining the degradation condition
(for example, remaining life etc.) for determining whether

or not updating or maintenance is necessary as a result of a given item of equipment becoming worn out, degradation diagnosis is executed by examining the environment in which the item of equipment is arranged and/or by examining the current degree of degradation of the equipment. Also, in order to infer the degradation condition of equipment, it is necessary to have a grasp of what degree of equipment degradation means that it will no longer be able to provide satisfactory function (has reached the end of its life).

Specifically, when executing degradation diagnosis of equipment, the state of degradation of the equipment must be inferred from the results of an examination of the environment obtained by environmental examination, and information regarding the relationship of the degree of degradation of the equipment possessed by the manufacturer who created the equipment and the state of degradation.

Typically, when executing degradation diagnosis of various types of equipment, the diagnosis requester (who may be the owner of the equipment to be diagnosed) requests a diagnostic service provider that has the detailed diagnostic know-how for the equipment to be diagnosed to carry out the task of diagnosis.

The diagnostic service provider from whom the diagnosis has been requested sends a technician who will execute the diagnosis to the site. This technician takes some time to measure and observe the necessary items for diagnosis. The

diagnostic service provider then collects and analyses the necessary data using its own equipment and/or techniques and provides the results to the diagnosis requester.

The diagnosis requester makes payment from time to time
5 for the diagnostic work and/or report. Alternatively, the diagnostic charges may be pre-paid as a service charge which is added in beforehand when the equipment is supplied.

As described above, when equipment degradation
diagnosis is executed, environmental examination to obtain a
10 precise grasp of the environment in which the equipment is installed, a diagnostic method of quantitatively evaluating the stress to which the equipment is subjected from the environment, and equipment information indicating what degree of stress results in equipment malfunction are
15 necessary.

However, examination of the environment in which the equipment is arranged, diagnosis of equipment degradation, and ascertaining equipment information are difficult. It is therefore difficult for the diagnosis requester to execute
20 degradation diagnosis of equipment himself.

The diagnosis requester therefore has no alternative to requesting degradation diagnosis from a diagnostic service provider, so the costs of equipment degradation diagnosis are raised.

Also, in order to execute diagnosis the diagnostic service provider must ensure that a technician is always available to the diagnostic service provider.

However, when circumstances occur such as that requests
5 overlap in this same period, it is difficult to ensure supply of a technician, so it is not necessarily possible to guarantee that diagnosis will be executed at the time point requested by the diagnosis requester.

Also, if arrangements are made to guarantee more than
10 the required number of technicians, this imposes a load on the diagnostic service provider in that human resources costs become high.

Also, conventionally, even if exactly the same diagnostic case is experienced, the diagnosis results
15 obtained by each diagnosis requester are the property of the respective diagnosis requesters, so there is no possibility of sharing the diagnosis results between the different diagnosis requesters.

Consequently, even if a plurality of diagnosis
20 requesters wish identical diagnoses to be carried out, the respective diagnosis requesters request identical diagnoses from the diagnosis service provider so that identical diagnoses are repeated in respect of the diagnosis service requesters. Consequently, diagnosis costs and diagnosis
25 labor are inefficient both for the diagnosis requesters and the diagnosis service provider.

Typically, diagnosis service providers have considered avoiding repetition of identical diagnoses by encapsulating diagnostic results for each diagnosis requester. However, for reasons of the duty of secrecy in regard to the data of a diagnosis requester and the fact that even duplicated work can still be charged to diagnosis fees, there is the problem that little progress has been made in regard to amelioration of work duplication.

Furthermore, a method in which, rather than dispatching a technician to measure the environmental data to the site, the diagnostic service provider executes degradation diagnosis by sending to the diagnosis requester an environment evaluation unit whereby the diagnosis requester can measure the environmental data is disclosed in Japanese Patent Application No. 2000 - 255957.

However, even with the invention of this Japanese Patent Application No. 2000 - 255957, it is difficult to make degradation diagnosis efficient, since degradation diagnosis is executed for respective diagnostic requests even if the diagnostic case is the same.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, one object of the present invention is to provide a novel degradation diagnostic method, degradation diagnostic mediation device and degradation diagnostic device and computer-readable recording medium on which a

program is recorded whereby the diagnostic know-how of the diagnostic service provider can be published on the Internet and degradation diagnosis executed efficiently for both the diagnosis requester and diagnosis service provider.

5 The above object is achieved by a degradation diagnostic method, degradation diagnostic mediation device and degradation diagnostic device and computer-readable recording medium on which a program is recorded constituted as follows.

10 Specifically, according to the degradation diagnostic method of the present invention, an equipment degradation diagnostic request is input from a diagnosis requester through the network, a degradation diagnosis requests handler is selected in accordance with degradation diagnosis execution condition information determined for at least one
15 degradation diagnostic request handler and condition information in accordance with which the diagnostic requester requests degradation diagnosis, execution of degradation diagnosis is requested of this selected
20 degradation diagnosis request handler, the execution results of the degradation diagnosis obtained by the selected degradation diagnosis request handler are acquired, and are output through the network to the diagnosis requester.

 It should be noted that the degradation diagnostic
25 mediator and the diagnostic service provider constituting the degradation diagnosis request handler which execute the

degradation diagnostic method of the present invention could be the same or different. The degradation diagnostic mediator collects mediation fees from the diagnosis requester or the diagnostic service provider. Also, the
5 diagnostic service provider may collect diagnostic fees from the diagnosis requester.

The execution condition information of degradation diagnosis specified in respect of the degradation diagnostic request handler includes for example the amount of
10 diagnostic fees, the method/type of degradation diagnosis and the type of information utilized in the degradation diagnosis.

The condition information in accordance with which the diagnosis requester requests degradation diagnosis includes,
15 for example, the amount of diagnostic fees payable, the method/type of degradation diagnosis required by the diagnosis requester, and the type of information which the diagnosis requester can provide for degradation diagnosis.

According to the present invention, mediation can be
20 effected between the diagnosis requester and diagnostic service provider, so degradation diagnosis is requested and degradation diagnosis is executed when their mutual conditions are satisfied.

Consequently, a diagnosis requester can obtain
25 execution results of degradation diagnosis which the requester desires with the fee which the requester desires.

Also, a diagnostic service provider can accept from a wide range of sources only degradation diagnostic requests matching its own conditions and can perform degradation diagnosis accordingly.

5 According to the present invention, when, for example, the environmental information utilized in the degradation diagnosis by the selected degradation diagnosis request handler is deficient, measurement can be requested by selecting a measurement requests handler of such deficient
10 environmental information, so that the measurement results of the deficient environmental information can be provided to the selected degradation diagnosis requests handler.

 It should be noted that the measurer of environmental information constituting the environmental information
15 measurement requests handler could be the same as or different from the degradation diagnosis mediator or diagnostic service provider. The environmental information measurer may collect environmental information measurement fees from the degradation diagnosis mediator, diagnosis
20 requester, or diagnostic service provider etc.

 Also, according to the present invention, for example, an equipment maintenance request may be input through the network from a diagnosis requester who has obtained the execution results and maintenance may thereby be requested
25 by selecting a maintenance request handler.

An equipment supplier constituting a maintenance request handler may be the same as or different from a degradation diagnosis mediator, environmental information measurer, or diagnostic service provider etc.

5 Also, according to the present invention, for example the content of a degradation diagnostic request and the results of execution of degradation diagnosis by a degradation diagnostic request handler may be registered in a diagnostic results database and, if a separate i.e.
10 another degradation diagnostic request having a prescribed relationship degradation diagnostic request input from the diagnosis requester is registered in the diagnostic results database, the execution results of the degradation diagnosis based on the degradation diagnosis request having this
15 prescribed relationship may be read from the diagnostic results database and output to the diagnosis requester through the network.

Also, in this case, the diagnosis requester and/or degradation diagnosis mediator that registered its
20 degradation diagnosis execution results in the diagnostic results database may collect a diagnostic results utilization fee from another requester that accessed the diagnostic results database.

As the prescribed relationship, for example, the
25 degradation diagnostic requests may be identical or similar.

In this way, degradation diagnosis execution results may be shared by a plurality of diagnosis requesters, so degradation diagnosis results may be provided to diagnosis requesters in an efficient manner and the business of the diagnostic service provider can be made more efficient.

If the present invention is applied in a modified fashion, information for diagnostic purposes specifying degradation diagnostic processing whereby the state of degradation of equipment can be diagnosed is stored in a diagnostic database, information utilized for degradation diagnostic processing is input from a diagnostic requester through the network, and degradation diagnostic processing executed in accordance with the information for diagnostic purposes stored in the diagnostic database and information input from the diagnosis requester, and these execution results can be output to the diagnosis requester through the network.

The performer of this degradation diagnostic method may collect performance fees of degradation diagnosis from the diagnosis requester. Also, a diagnostic service provider whose information for diagnostic purposes is stored in the diagnostic database may collect fees for the provision of its know-how from the performer of this degradation diagnostic method or diagnosis requester.

The method of degradation diagnosis of the present invention as described above could be utilized in the

operation of a degradation diagnosis mediating device or the modified degradation diagnostic method of the present invention could be utilized in the operation of a degradation diagnostic device.

5 Furthermore, the degradation diagnostic method of the present invention and the modified degradation diagnostic method of the present invention could be utilized by recording a program for execution thereof by a computer on a recording medium.

10 By employing a recording medium on which such a program is recorded, functions for executing the method described above can be added in a simple fashion to servers, computers, or computational systems that do not have functions for executing the methods described above.

15

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete appreciation of the present invention and many of the attendant advantages thereof will be readily obtained as the same becomes better understood by reference
20 to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is a view illustrating by way of example a diagrammatic layout of a degradation diagnosis system in which a method of degradation diagnosis according to a first
25 embodiment of the present invention is implemented;

Figure 2 is a view illustrating by way of example the storage content of a user information database;

Figure 3 is a view illustrating by way of example the storage content of a diagnostic client information database;

5 Figure 4 is a view illustrating by way of example the storage content of an environmental measurement client information database;

10 Figure 5 is a view illustrating by way of example the storage content of an equipment supply client information database;

Figure 6 is a view showing diagrammatically part of the diagnostic service provider information registered in the diagnostic client information database;

15 Figure 7 is a view showing diagrammatically part of the environmental measurer information recorded in the environmental measurement client information database;

Figure 8 is a view showing diagrammatically environmental data that is insufficient for diagnosis by diagnostic service providers;

20 Figure 9 is a view illustrating diagrammatically combinations of diagnostic service provider and environmental measurer capable of executing diagnosis and their diagnosis charges;

25 Figure 10 is a view illustrating by way of example the diagrammatic layout of a degradation diagnostic system for

implementing a degradation diagnostic method according to a second embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 11 is a view illustrating an example of the display of a menu screen provided to a user by a degradation
5 diagnostic server;

Figure 12 is a block diagram illustrating an example of the layout of a degradation diagnostic server;

Figure 13 is a view illustrating by way of example a table of environmental ranges;

10 Figure 14 is a view illustrating by way of example a table of weighting factors of environmental factors;

Figure 15 is a view illustrating by way of example a step of deriving corrosion weight loss;

Figure 16 is a view illustrating by way of example an
15 altered condition of a degradation progress condition model formula;

Figure 17 is a view illustrating by way of example an environmental evaluation points range table;

Figure 18 is a view illustrating an example of a
20 function for calculating environmental evaluation points from the values of environmental factors;

Figure 19 is a view illustrating change of the corrosion weight loss function;

Figure 20 is a block diagram illustrating a first
25 business method implemented by a degradation diagnostic system;

Figure 20 is a block diagram illustrating a first business method implemented by a degradation diagnostic system;

Figure 21 is a block diagram illustrating a second business method implemented by a degradation diagnostic system;

Figure 22 is a block diagram illustrating a third business method implemented by a degradation diagnostic system;

Figure 23 is a block diagram illustrating a fourth business method implemented by a degradation diagnostic system;

Figure 24 is a block diagram illustrating a fifth business method implemented by a degradation diagnostic system;

Figure 25 is a block diagram illustrating a sixth business method implemented by a degradation diagnostic system; and

Figure 26 is a view illustrating the layout of a degradation diagnostic system for implementing a degradation diagnostic method according to a fourth embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings, wherein like reference numerals designate identical or corresponding parts

throughout the several views, and more particularly to Figure 1 thereof, one embodiment of the present invention will be described.

(First embodiment)

5 In this embodiment, a degradation diagnostic method that mediates between a diagnosis request and diagnostic result between a diagnosis requester and diagnostic service provider is described.

10 Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating by way of example the layout of a degradation diagnostic system for implementing a degradation diagnostic method according to this embodiment.

A degradation diagnosis mediation server 2 in this degradation diagnostic system 1 is connected through a communications circuit such as Internet 4 with a plurality of user clients 3 operated by users.

In environmental data diagnostic conditions definitions section 5 of user client 3, there are defined data (temperature, humidity, concentration of corrosive gas, amount of dust, and amount of sea salt particles etc.) relating to the environment in which the equipment (component) to be diagnosed is arranged and the diagnostic specification constituting the condition information specified when the diagnosis was requested (name of equipment to be diagnosed (component name), specification of equipment to be diagnosed (component), size of the equipment

to be diagnosed, desired precision of diagnosis, requested level of diagnostic fees, and diagnostic period etc.).

User client 3 sends the environmental data and diagnostic specification to degradation diagnosis mediation
5 server 2.

User information registration section 6 of degradation diagnosis mediation server 2 receives the environmental data and diagnostic specification, and registers these in user information database 7.

10 Also, degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 is connected with a plurality of diagnostic clients 8 operated by the diagnostic service provider that executes the equipment diagnosis through a communication circuit such as Internet 4.

15 In diagnosis execution information definition section 9 of diagnostic client 8, there are defined as the diagnosis execution specification data conditions for executing diagnosis such as the type of environmental data needed for executing diagnosis (temperature, humidity, concentration of
20 corrosive gas, amount of dust, and amount of sea salt particles etc.), information of the equipment to be diagnosed needed to execute diagnosis (name of equipment to be diagnosed, specification of equipment to be diagnosed etc.) and charges for executing diagnosis.

Diagnostic client 8 sends the diagnosis execution specification to the degradation diagnosis mediation server 2.

Diagnostic client information registering section 10 of degradation diagnosis mediation server 2 registers the diagnosis execution specification received from diagnosis execution information definition section 9 in diagnostic client information database 11.

Also, degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 is connected with an equipment supplier client 12 operated by the equipment supplier that supplies information regarding the components used in the equipment through a communication circuit such as Internet 4.

In component information definition section 13 of equipment supply client 12, there is defined the information of components employed in the equipment (component name, rating, materials used, construction, and position of arrangement of the component).

Equipment supply client 12 sends the component information to degradation diagnostic mediation server 2.

Equipment supply client information registration section 14 of degradation diagnosis mediation server 2 registers the information received from equipment supply client 12 in equipment supply client information database 15.

Also, degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 is connected with a plurality of environmental measurement

clients 16 operated by the environmental measurer that examines the atmospheric environment through a communications circuit such as Internet 4.

In environmental measurement information definition
5 section 17 of environment measurement client 16, there is defined an environmental measurement specification comprising the environmental factors (temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, concentration of various types of gas, degree of soiling, amount of sea salt particles and amount
10 of dust, etc.) and the charges for examining these.

Environmental measurement client 16 sends the environmental measurement specification to degradation diagnostic mediating client 2.

Environmental measurement client information
15 registration section 18 of degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 registers the environmental measurement specification received from environmental measurement client 16 in environmental measurement client information database
19.

20 Selection section 20 of degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 selects a diagnostic client that can execute the diagnosis desired by the user by referring to the user information registered in user information database 7 and the information registered in diagnostic client
25 information database 11. For example, a diagnostic service provider that executes the diagnosis with the charge desired

by the user, or a diagnostic service provider that executes the diagnostic method desired by the user is selected.

Also, selection section 20 ascertains the environmental data required for executing the diagnosis by the diagnostic service provider selected and the environmental data registered by the user in the user information database 7 and, if there is insufficient environmental data, selects an environmental measurer capable of making an inspection concerning the deficient environmental data in accordance with registered contents of environmental measurement client information database 19. However, if the environmental data registered in the user information database 7 is sufficient, selection of an environmental measurer is dispensed with.

Also, selection section 20 ascertains the information of the equipment to be diagnosed that is necessary for execution of diagnosis by the selected diagnostic service provider and the information of the equipment to be diagnosed that is registered by the user in user information database 7 and, if there is insufficient information concerning the equipment that is to be diagnosed, selects an equipment supplier capable of supplying the deficient information concerning the equipment that is to be diagnosed in accordance with the registered content of equipment supplier client information database 15 and reads the deficient information of the equipment that is to be diagnosed. However, if the information concerning the

equipment that is to be diagnosed that is registered in the user information database 7 is sufficient, selection of an equipment supplier is dispensed with.

Selection section 20 sends to user client 3 that is
5 operated by the user information such as the name of the diagnostic service provider fulfilling the user diagnostic request, the name of the environmental measurer, the name of the equipment supply client, the necessary charges for diagnosis, and the charges for environmental measurement etc.
10 The diagnostic service providers that are suited for the diagnosis, environmental measurers, equipment suppliers and required fees for diagnosis are thereby communicated to the user.

The user selects a desired combination of one or a
15 plurality of diagnostic service providers, environmental measurers and equipment suppliers from these combinations that have been introduced/proposed, and a diagnosis request is thereby sent from user client 3 to selection section 20.

Using the information received from user client 3,
20 selection section 20 makes a diagnosis request to diagnosis client 8 operated by the diagnostic service provider contained in the selected combination and makes a request for execution of environmental measurement to environmental measurement client 16 that is operated by the environmental
25 measurer contained in the selected combination.

However, if request mediation authority is given to the degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 by the user, the diagnostic service provider and environmental measures are automatically selected by selection section 20 not exceeding
5 the desired value of diagnostic fees registered by user client 3, and execution of diagnosis and environmental measurement are requested.

The environmental measurer conducts an examination of the environmental data whose examination has been requested
10 using environmental measurement processing section 21, measures the values of environmental factors defined by environmental measurement information definition section 17, and sends these to environmental data provision section 22 of degradation diagnosis mediation server 2.

15 Environmental data provision section 22 registers the environmental data received from environmental measurement client 16 in the diagnosis results database 23 and sends these to the diagnostic client 8 operated by the selected diagnostic service provider.

20 Also, selection section 20, referring to the user information database 7 and equipment supply client information database 15, sends the diagnostic specification required for diagnosis, environmental data and equipment information to the diagnostic client 8 operated by the
25 selected diagnostic service provider.

However, if the information of the equipment to be diagnosed registered in user information database 7 is sufficient, the information of equipment supplier client information database 15 is not utilized.

5 Diagnostic client 8 executes degradation diagnostic processing by means of diagnostic processing section 24, using the data received from degradation diagnostic mediation server 2.

10 Diagnostic client 8 then sends the diagnosis results and the treatment information (prescription data) of the equipment to be diagnosed corresponding to these diagnostic results to results registration section 25 of degradation diagnosis mediation server 2.

15 Results registration section 25 of degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 registers the received diagnostic results and treatment information together with the data employed for diagnosis in diagnostic results database 23 of degradation diagnosis mediation server 2.

20 The data employed for diagnosis comprises the information employed in degradation diagnostic processing of diagnostic client 8 such as for example environmental data received from user client 3, diagnosis charges made by diagnostic client 8, diagnostic period, diagnostic client name, environmental data received from environmental measurement clients 16 and measurement charges therefor, 25 period of examination, environmental measurement client name,

information concerning the equipment to be diagnosed
received from user client 3, and information of equipment to
be diagnosed received from equipment supplier client 12 etc.

Also, the data stored/held in diagnostic results
5 database 23 is transmitted to user client 3 operated by the
user that requested the diagnosis, by means of results
output section 26.

The user pays the diagnostic charges, environmental
measurement charges and mediation charges respectively to
10 the diagnostic service provider, environmental measurer, and
degradation diagnostic agent that executed the diagnosis.
Payment is executed by means of a settlement organization 27
connected through Internet 4.

Diagnostic client 8 presents to user client 3 the
15 diagnostic results and treatment information for the
equipment to be diagnosed in regard to these diagnostic
results, but, if the treatment information contains a
reference introducing equipment to be updated or a reference
introducing equipment required for prolongation of life,
20 this introduction will make preferential reference to the
products of the equipment supplier that provided the
information.

If the user wishes to execute equipment updating or
life prolonging treatment in response to the treatment
25 information that has thus been provided, the user requests
maintenance by transmitting the treatment information and

desired cost of execution to maintenance request selection
section 28 of degradation diagnostic agent server 2.

Referring to the equipment supplier client information
database 15, maintenance request selection section 28
5 selects an equipment supplier matching the conditions, from
the registered equipment suppliers, and makes a request to
life prolongation replacement treatment section 29 of
equipment supplier client 12 operated by the selected
equipment supplier to execute the task of fulfilling the
10 prescription based on the treatment information.

It should be noted that some equipment suppliers are
preferentially introduced in the treatment information
presented to user client 3 from degradation diagnostic agent
server 2; when a user makes a request to this equipment
15 supplier for fulfillment of a prescription based on the
treatment information, maintenance request selection section
28 communicates this request for fulfillment of the
prescription based on the treatment information to the
equipment supplier client 12 operated by the equipment
20 supplier selected by the user without executing selection of
an equipment supplier.

When user information is newly received by user
information registration section 6, re-utilizable results
output section 30 of degradation diagnostic agent server 2
25 accesses diagnostic results database 23 to determine whether
the new environmental data and diagnostic specification are

the same as or similar to information utilized in diagnosis that was previously received; if they are indeed the same or similar, a diagnostic result produced using the information that was previously received and utilized in diagnosis is
5 read from diagnostic result database 23 and transmitted to user client 3.

Figure 2 is a view illustrating an example of the stored contents of user information database 7. For each user, the desired diagnostic charge, equipment desired to be
10 diagnosed, precision of diagnosis, and various types of environmental data are stored.

Figure 3 is a view showing an example of the stored contents of diagnostic client information database 11. For each diagnostic service provider, the diagnostic charges,
15 diagnosed equipment, precision of diagnosis, environmental data required for diagnosis and equipment information required for diagnosis are stored.

Figure 4 is a view showing an example of the stored contents of environmental measurement client information
20 database 19. For each environment measurer, the examination charge and environmental data capable being examined are stored.

Figure 5 is a view showing an example of the stored contents of an equipment supplier client information
25 database 15. For each equipment supplier, the type of equipment handled and its rating are stored.

Hereinbelow, the process of selecting a diagnostic service provider and an environmental measurer matching the user conditions by selection section 20 is described.

Figure 16 is a view showing diagrammatically
5 information of some of the diagnostic service providers b1 to b4 registered in diagnostic client information database 11.

In this example, four diagnostic service provider companies b1 to b4 are registered in diagnostic client
10 information database 11 and the environmental data that is required for diagnosis by the respective diagnostic service providers b1 to b4 is indicated by A to E.

For example, in the case of diagnostic service provider b1, only environmental data A, B are required for executing
15 the diagnosis and C, D, E are not required; the fee for the diagnosis is Fa.

Figure 7 is a view showing diagrammatically the information of some of the environmental measurers c1 to c5 registered in environmental measurement client information
20 database 19.

In this example, five environmental measurer companies c1 to c5 are registered in environment measurement client information database 19 and the environmental data that can be examined by these respective environmental measurers c1
25 to c5 is indicated by A to E.

For example, in the case of environmental measurer c1, environmental data A, B, E can be examined but environmental data C, D cannot be examined; the fee for executing the examination is F1.

5 The user information is registered in user information database 2; if some of this user information has the content: "desired diagnostic fee: M", "environmental data that can be provided by the user: A, C", selection section 20 of degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 operates as
10 follows.

First of all, the environmental data A, C received from the user is compared with the environmental data required by diagnostic service providers b1 to b4 shown in Figure 6 above and environmental data that is deficient in respect of
15 diagnostic service providers b1 to b4 is found.

Figure 8 is a view showing diagrammatically the environmental data that is insufficient for diagnosis by diagnostic service providers b1 to b4. For example, if there are only environmental data A and C, it shows that
20 environmental data B is deficient in respect of diagnosis by diagnostic service provider b1.

Next, based on the deficient environmental data, for the respective diagnostic service providers b1 to b4, environmental measurers capable of examining these deficient
25 environmental data are selected from the above Figure 7 and combinations of diagnostic service providers and

environmental measurers capable of executing diagnosis are found.

Next, for each of the combinations of diagnostic service provider and environmental measurer found, the
5 totals of diagnosis execution charge of the diagnostic service provider necessary for execution of diagnosis, the environmental measurement charge of the environmental measurer and the mediation fee m of the degradation diagnostic agent server 2 are listed in order of lowest cost,
10 and the combinations for which the desired diagnostic fee registered by the user is no more than M are found. The combinations for which the desired diagnostic fee M is exceeded are also found.

Figure 9 is a view showing diagrammatically the
15 combinations of diagnostic service provider and environmental measurer capable of executing diagnosis and their diagnostic fees.

This content is transmitted to user client 3 from selection section 20 and presented to the user. If requested
20 by the user, combinations for which the desired diagnostic fee M is exceeded are also presented.

By operating user client 3, the user selects a desired combination from the combinations of diagnostic service provider and environmental measurer and notifies this to
25 selection section 20 of degradation diagnostic agent server 2.

Selection section 20 makes a request for execution of diagnosis to the diagnostic service provider based on the information which has been notified to it, or makes a request to the diagnostic service provider and environmental
5 measurer for execution of diagnosis and environmental examination.

In this embodiment, if the diagnosis execution fee comprising the mediation fee m of degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 and/or the diagnosis agency execution fee
10 is below the diagnostic fee desired by user, diagnosis mediation/diagnosis agency are executed. On the other hand, when the diagnosis execution fee exceeds the diagnostic fee desired by the user, mediation of diagnosis/diagnostic agency is not executed. However, even in this case,
15 combinations of diagnostic service providers and environmental measurers needed to execute diagnosis and diagnostic execution fees based on combinations of diagnostic service providers and environmental measurers, even though these exceed the desired diagnostic fee, are
20 presented to the user, so that if the user accepts fee alteration and requests diagnosis, diagnosis can be executed.

By executing the degradation diagnostic method of this embodiment as described above, the respective items of information of the diagnostic service providers,
25 environmental measurers, and equipment suppliers can be managed, diagnostic service providers, environmental

measurers, and equipment suppliers selected in accordance with a request from a user, and introduced to the user. Also, if agency authority for selection is given to the degradation diagnosis mediator by the user, selection of diagnostic service providers, environmental measurers, and equipment suppliers can be executed on an agency basis by the degradation diagnosis mediator. Degradation diagnosis is then executed by the selected diagnostic service provider, environmental measurer and equipment supplier and the diagnostic results presented to the user.

In this way, it is possible for the user to request the various types of service involved in degradation diagnosis solely from the diagnostic service providers, environmental measurers or equipment suppliers that satisfy conditions presented by the user himself.

Also, since the user can acquire degradation diagnosis results executed using the same or similar data from the diagnostic results database 23, the user can predict the results of the diagnosis the user has requested.

That is, according to this embodiment, a user can request diagnosis in accordance with the user's own conditions, and can therefore take suitable counter-measures against degradation of equipment based on the diagnostic results.

A mediation fee and/or registration fee can be collected by the degradation diagnosis mediator.

A diagnostic service provider can receive a diagnosis execution request and collect a diagnosis fee.

An environmental measurer can receive an environmental measurement request and collect an examination fee.

5 Equipment suppliers' sales opportunities for equipment are increased and they can receive maintenance requests.

It should be noted that, in this embodiment, if the fee exceeds the user's desired diagnostic fee and, although the diagnostic execution fee is presented to the user, the user
10 does not accept fee alteration, diagnostic service providers that execute diagnosis with a cost not exceeding the user's desired diagnostic fee and environmental measurers that measure environmental data required by the diagnostic service provider at a cost not exceeding the user's desired
15 diagnostic fee are disclosed to an unspecified large number of diagnostic service providers and environmental measurers through an information network such as the Internet, so a reverse auction can be executed on the network.

When a reverse auction is to be executed, before
20 canvassing for information by the reverse auction, the user, registered diagnostic service providers and environmental measurers are notified beforehand of the information concerning the reverse auction. After this, the user's permission is confirmed and, if there are no new bids
25 (alteration of diagnostic execution fee or environmental examination execution fee) by the diagnostic service

providers or environmental measurers selected, canvassing in accordance with the reverse auction is executed.

In this way, parties who can execute the diagnosis for the user's desired diagnostic fee are canvassed, and

5 mediation with the user or delegated execution of a diagnostic request can be executed.

It should be noted that use of the degradation diagnostic mediation server 2 in this embodiment could also be executed by the diagnostic service providers, environment
10 measurers or equipment suppliers. Also, provision of diagnostic services, environmental measurement, or supply of equipment could be executed by the same parties such as for example environmental measurement also being executed by a diagnostic service provider.

15 (Second embodiment)

In this embodiment, a degradation diagnostic method is described in which a service for executing environmental diagnosis of equipment, degradation diagnosis or life
20 diagnosis is provided through the Internet. A characteristic feature of the method of degradation diagnosis according to this embodiment is that a diagnostic technique capable of constituting a de facto standard is published on the Internet, or a diagnostic database is established whereby data is shared on the Internet.

25 Figure 10 is a view illustrating by way of example the diagrammatic layout of a degradation diagnostic system for

executing the degradation diagnostic method according to this embodiment.

5 This degradation diagnostic system 31 has a construction whereby a user client 32 constituting a user side interface i.e. the diagnosis requester, a diagnostic client 33 constituting a diagnostic service provider side interface, a degradation diagnostic server 34 that provides a diagnostic service by executing degradation diagnosis of equipment in response to a request from user client 32 using
10 information from diagnostic client 33, and a diagnostic database 35 that holds data required for the provision of the diagnostic service and execution of diagnosis are present on the Internet, not shown. Also, in degradation diagnostic system 31, the server 33 of a credit sales
15 company (settlement organization) manages payment of charges between user client 32 and diagnostic client 33.

Diagnostic database 35 comprises a user information database 35a that accumulates user information including name, affiliation, address, telephone number, mail address
20 (e-mail address), and desired service, a diagnostic results database 35b that accumulates diagnostic cases (diagnostic results and diagnostic data) etc., and a diagnostic reference database 35c that accumulates information for diagnostic purposes that specifies the content of
25 degradation diagnostic processing.

The information for diagnostic purposes includes for example the type of environmental factors utilized in degradation diagnostic processing, set references of environmental evaluation points, formulae for modeling the state of progress of degradation, and degradation - correlated information etc.

Environmental factors constitute elements of various types indicating environmental state. For example, environmental factors include: temperature, humidity, concentration of hydrogen sulphide, concentration of sulphur dioxide gas, concentration of NOx, concentration of chlorine, concentration of ammonia and degree of equipment soiling etc.

Environmental evaluation points are index values indicating the level of hostility (harmfulness) of the environment. These environmental evaluation points can be found for example by converting the values of environmental factors to numbers of points in accordance with a predetermined standard.

The formulae for modeling the state of progress of degradation are standardized numerical formulae for calculating the degree of degradation in accordance with environmental evaluation points.

Degradation - correlated information (degradation progress condition master curve) is information determining the relationship between the condition of progress of degradation and time, for example, for each environmental

evaluation point and comprises various types of correlation curve for inferring the degree of degradation of equipment structural components/materials and remaining life.

The degradation diagnostic service provided by a
5 degradation diagnostic system 31 as described above is described below.

First of all, a diagnostic service provider accesses degradation diagnostic server 34 by operating diagnostic client 33, and registers information for diagnostic purposes
10 needed for execution of its own degradation diagnostic processing in diagnostic reference database 35c.

Next, a user accesses degradation diagnostic server 34 by operating user client 32 and registers the user's own user information in user information database 35a.

15 When this is done, a request for user confirmation is made to the server 36 of a credit sales company from degradation diagnostic server 34, using the credit card number included in the user information, and the result of the user verification from credit sales company server 36 is
20 notified to degradation diagnostic server 34. If the user's credit card number is valid, degradation diagnostic server 34 distributes a diagnostic manual for executing diagnosis to this user's user client 32.

Next, the user information such as the user address and
25 name is communicated to diagnostic client 33 that is operated by the diagnostic service provider from the

degradation diagnostic server 34, and an environmental evaluation unit is sent to the user from the diagnostic service provider.

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The environmental evaluation unit is a unit that
5 accommodates, for example, reagents and measurement devices
for measurement of the degree of hostility of the
environment in which the equipment to be diagnosed is
employed. The environmental evaluation unit includes, for
example, a thermometer for measuring the temperature of the
10 environment in which the equipment to be diagnosed is
arranged, a humidity meter for measuring the humidity of
this environment, an alkaline filter paper or metallic plate
such as copper, silver or aluminum for evaluating the type
and/or concentration of corrosive gases in this environment,
15 acidic filter paper for evaluating the concentration of
ammonium ions in this environment, and capturing gauze for
evaluating sea salt particles in this environment etc.

The user uses this environmental evaluation unit to
measure, for example, the temperature, humidity,
20 concentration of hydrogen sulphide, concentration of sulphur
dioxide gas, NOx concentration, concentration of chlorine,
ammonia concentration and degree of soiling of the equipment
and inputs these data (measured values) to degradation
diagnostic server 34 by operating user client 32.

25 When this is being done, diagnostic reference database
35c is accessed by degradation diagnostic server 34 to find

the values of the environmental factors by using the data
input from user client 32 and the information for diagnostic
purposes, to find the environmental evaluation points by
using the values of the environmental factors and the
5 information for diagnostic purposes, and to find the state
of progress of degradation by using the environmental
evaluation points and formulae for modeling the state of
progress of degradation or degradation - correlated
information.

10 The diagnostic results such as the state of progress of
degradation found by the degradation diagnostic server 34
are stored in diagnostic results database 35b and output to
user client 32 to be presented to the user.

When the user has been presented with the diagnostic
15 results, the user accesses server 36 of the credit sales
company by operating user client 32 and executes the
procedure for payment of the diagnostic fees. When this done,
the charges paid by the user are presented to the diagnostic
service provider.

20 Additionally, the diagnostic service provider may
execute as appropriate supplementation/replacement of
components of the diagnostic evaluation unit sent to the
user. Also, when the degradation diagnostic processing which
the diagnostic service provider provides needs to be updated,
25 the diagnostic service provider provides the user with a new
unit for measuring the data necessary for degradation

diagnosis processing. Furthermore, the diagnostic service provider that provides the new degradation diagnostic processing makes a request to degradation diagnostic server 34 for updating/referencing of diagnostic reference database 35c and, if this is allowed, registers information for diagnostic purposes specifying the content of menu information or new degradation diagnostic processing for providing new degradation diagnostic processing in diagnostic reference database 35c either through degradation diagnostic server 34 or directly.

Let us now assume that another user requests access to diagnostic results database 35b from degradation diagnostic server 34 by operating the user's own user client 32. When this is done, the diagnostic results stored in this diagnostic results database 35b are accessed by a degradation diagnosis server 34 and these diagnostic results are provided to the user client operated by the other user that made an access request. The other user can thereby infer the state of degradation of the user's own equipment by referring to diagnostic results for equipment of the same type as the user's own equipment.

Figure 11 is a view illustrating an example of a menu screen presented to a user by degradation diagnostic server 34.

Degradation diagnostic server 34 holds information (such as, for example, information in home page form)

displaying a diagnostic menu 37 when read into a browser.
When the browser of user client 32 reads this information,
diagnostic menu 37 is displayed.

The user executes a selection operation while referring
5 to the diagnostic menu 37 on user client 32. The items of
the diagnostic menu 37 include, for example, "environmental
diagnosis" in which the atmospheric corrosion level of the
environment in which the equipment is arranged and/or its
degree of soiling are quantitatively diagnosed by deriving
10 environmental evaluation points for the equipment
environment and "degradation diagnosis" in which the degree
of degradation or life of the components of the equipment is
derived from the environmental evaluation points. In
addition to these, "degradation diagnosis of various types
15 of components" may be provided as an item of diagnostic menu
37. When this item "degradation diagnosis of various types
of component" is selected and data such as the type and year
of manufacture of the components, environment of use, form
of compounds, and electrical conditions of use etc. are
20 input to degradation diagnostic server 34, degradation
diagnostic server 34 compares this input data with past
diagnostic results and derives the inferred degree of
degradation or remaining life of the various components (ICs,
capacitors, transistors, printed circuit boards, relays,
25 connectors, switches etc.).

In addition, "refer to previous diagnostic cases" may be provided as an item of diagnostic menu 37. If this "refer to previous diagnostic cases" is selected, it becomes possible to refer to previous diagnostic results published and recorded in diagnostic results database 35b, so a diagnostic result can be obtained without actually executing degradation diagnosis.

Degradation diagnostic server 34 summarizes the results concerning "environmental diagnosis" or "degradation diagnosis" in the form of a diagnostic report which is stored in diagnostic results database 35b; in addition, information concerning counter-measures such as environmental improvement measures or equipment improvement measures derived from the diagnostic results is output to user client 32.

When one or other of the diagnostic items of diagnostic menu 37 is clicked, degradation diagnostic server 34 requests input of the data required for the selected item from the user operating user client 32.

Figure 12 is a block diagram illustrating an example layout of degradation diagnostic server 34.

Degradation diagnostic server 34 chiefly comprises interface section 38, user information management section 39, diagnostic procedure distribution section 40, diagnostic section 41, storage section 42, storage management section 43, and fee management section 44.

Interface section 38 handles input/output between user client 32 and diagnostic client 33 in the form of a home page.

User information management section 39 manages the user information required for providing the diagnostic service. Specifically, user information management section 39 executes a function of requesting input of user information when a user who has accessed degradation diagnostic server 34 desires some diagnostic service, a function of updating user information database 35a in accordance with input user information, a user classification function of setting user access rights to the diagnostic database 35 for each service desired by the user and a function of storing user service utilization history.

By the operation of this user information management section 39, user information required for a user to receive diagnostic information is set for each diagnostic service, and the user thereby becomes capable of utilizing the service. Also, the user information input from users by this user information management section 39 is managed in unified fashion by user information database 35a.

Diagnostic procedure distribution section 40 distributes a diagnostic procedure such that the data needed for diagnosis can be prepared at the user end. Specifically, this diagnostic procedure distribution section 40, when a user whose user information is registered wishes to execute

the diagnosis, executes a function of distributing to this user a diagnostic manual describing a method of on-site evaluation of the environment around the equipment and a function of issuing to the responsible department

5 instructions for sending an environmental evaluation unit to users who have requested this, of the users to whom the manual has been distributed.

10 The user prepares the data for input to the degradation diagnosis server 34 by making a choice of collecting data by independently preparing samples for environmental evaluation in accordance with the diagnostic manual downloaded from the degradation diagnostic server 34, or by acquiring data by employing the services of a specialist, or by receiving delivery of an environmental evaluation unit from the

15 diagnostic service provider and collecting the data using this.

Diagnostic section 41 derives the diagnostic results by using the data input by the user and data stored in diagnostic database 35. Specifically, this diagnostic

20 section 41, when a user whose user information has been registered desires execution of diagnosis, executes a function of requesting input from the user of data needed for the diagnostic items selected by the user, a function of selecting a degradation progress state modeling formula or

25 degradation-correlated information from diagnostic reference database 35c in accordance with the input data, and a

function of deriving diagnostic results by substituting the input data in the selected degradation progress state modeling formula or degradation-correlated information.

5 An example of degradation-correlated information is a time sequence variation curve of IC aluminum pattern corrosion in which the amount of corrosion that renders the IC defective in operation is defined as the life point corrosion amount. In this case, respective correlation curves are stored in diagnostic reference database 35c for
10 each type of IC component. Apart from this, cases may be considered wherein, for example, the corrosion rate of the metallic material in respective atmospheric environments and the amount of corrosion of metallic materials that defines the component life are stored in diagnostic reference
15 database 35c and the life is inferred by inputting the amount of corrosion at the diagnostic time point as data.

In storage section 42 the diagnostic results are collected and a diagnostic report is prepared. Specifically, storage section 42 executes a function of selecting from
20 diagnostic result database 35b a report format in accordance with the service desired by the user, a function of setting out diagnostic results in a format and a function of storing in diagnostic results database 35b reports that have been prepared.

25 By the action of this storage section 42, the diagnostic results found by diagnostic section 41 are

collected into report form and stored in diagnostic database 35; this degradation diagnostic server 34 makes the report viewable through the Internet and the report may be transmitted by fax distribution.

5 Storage management section 43 manages reference/updating of diagnostic database 35 in accordance with requests from user client 32 and/or diagnostic client 33. Specifically, this storage management section 43 executes a function of controlling access rights of users to
10 diagnostic database 35 in accordance with access rights of users to diagnostic database 35 set by a user classification function, a function of storing user access history of diagnostic database 35, a security function of excluding
15 users that illicitly access diagnostic database 35 from user information database 35a, and a function of ensuring anonymity of providers of these diagnostic results when the diagnostic results are referred to.

By the action of this storage management section 43, if a user only desires environmental diagnostic service, only
20 use of the data relating to environmental diagnosis, of the storage contents of diagnostic database 35, is permitted and the user cannot access data relating to degradation diagnosis. Also, if a user only desires a service of referencing past cases of diagnosis, the user can only refer
25 to the desired data in question in the diagnostic results database 35b: access rights to data other than this or

execution of environmental diagnosis or execution of
degradation diagnosis are denied. Thus, the user's access
condition is continually managed and a user who repeats
illicit access is deemed to be a user executing illicit
5 access and is excluded.

Fee management section 44 determines the fees invoiced
to a user operating user client 32 and/or a diagnostic
service provider operating diagnostic client 33 in
accordance with the content of the service and executes
10 settlement procedure. Specifically, fee management section
44 executes a function of requesting input of a credit card
number from a user desiring to utilize the diagnostic
service, a function of ascertaining permission of service
provision by confirming the input credit card number on
15 server 36 of the credit sales company, a function, if
service is provided, of calculating invoiced fees from a
diagnostic service price table and the service utilization
history of the user stored in user information management
section 39, a function of invoicing the calculated fees, and
20 a settlement function of confirming the situation in regard
to payment processing and determination of completion of the
transaction.

Thanks to the action of this fee management section 44,
even if a user's user information is registered by accessing
25 degradation diagnostic server 34 so that the user is capable
of utilizing this degradation diagnostic server 34, this

service cannot be received unless a decision of permission of service provision has been obtained by inputting the credit card number immediately prior to provision of the service that is being charged for. Distribution of the environmental evaluation unit or diagnostic manual is also not executed unless a decision of permission of service provision has been obtained.

Also, even when degradation diagnostic processing is executed by degradation diagnostic server 34, display of the diagnostic results is put in a holding condition until a decision of permission of service provision has been obtained and the diagnostic results are only displayed after the decision of permission of service provision has been obtained. This calculation of fees is executed by referring to the table of prices and service utilization history; the decision of permission of service provision is achieved by online confirmation with the server 36 of the credit sales company. Basically, fee invoicing and settlement are executed in accordance with the know-how of the credit sales company.

A detailed description of the specific content of degradation diagnostic processing executed by diagnostic section 41 of degradation diagnostic server 34 in accordance with information for diagnostic purposes stored in diagnostic reference database 35c is given below with reference to the drawings.

The degradation diagnostic method set out in Japanese Patent Application Number 2000 - 251355 can be utilized as a specific example of degradation diagnostic processing executed by diagnostic section 41 in accordance with the
5 information for diagnostic purposes.

First of all, diagnostic section 41 inputs the values of various environmental factors indicating the condition of the environment in which the equipment to be diagnosed is arranged (for example, temperature, humidity, concentration
10 of hydrogen sulphide, sulphur dioxide gas concentration, chlorine concentration, ammonia concentration and degree of soiling of the equipment etc).

Next, diagnostic section 41 reads from diagnostic reference database 35c the environmental range table 45 of
15 JEIDA - 63 (Revision as of July, 2000) shown in Figure 13 and the weighting factor Table 46 of environmental factors shown in Figure 14, and calculates the environmental evaluation points= $A+B+C1+C2+C3+C4+C5+D$ from the values of the various environmental factors.

20 Next, diagnostic section 41 infers the state of progress of degradation (corrosion weight loss of the metal) of the metallic material of the equipment by referring to corrosion progress state and modeling formula W (this is, for example, a function of the environmental evaluation
25 value e and time d, being a function of the amount of metallic corrosion weight loss wherein the amount of

corrosive weight loss of metal becomes larger as the environmental evaluation value e or time d becomes larger) in diagnostic reference database 35c, using the calculated environmental evaluation points.

5 For example, as shown in Figure 15A, diagnostic section 41 calculates the average environmental evaluation points in a given period, and infers the current and subsequent state of progress of degradation assuming that these continue in the future as in the past.

10 It should be noted that, as shown in Figure 15B, the state of degradation progress may be inferred by calculating successively the environmental evaluation points at desired time points, reflecting the past history of the environmental evaluation points. In this way, the state of
15 progress of degradation can be predicted more accurately than by predicting the average state of progress of degradation as in Figure 15A described above, by inferring the state of progress of degradation reflecting past history.

Next, diagnostic section 41 reads the limiting
20 thickness of the metallic location converted into database form for each item of equipment/type of component in the form of a life point threshold value from diagnostic reference database 35c. Then, it calculates the remaining life by fitting the threshold value and the state of
25 progress of degradation at the current time point with degradation progress state modeling formula W. For example,

as shown in Figure 16, with a given equipment to be
diagnosed, if the degradation progress state modeling
formula is $W=g(E, d)$, the current environmental evaluation
point is E_0 , the state of degradation progress is W_0 , and
5 the life point threshold value is W_1 , the remaining life is
calculated as $d_1 - d_0 = g^{-1}(E_0, W_1) - g^{-1}(E_0, W_0)$.

It should be noted that, instead of the degradation
progress state modeling formula, a degradation progress
state master curve expressing for each environmental
10 evaluation point the relationship between the state of
degradation progress and time could be employed.

As other examples, the diagnostic methods set out in
Japanese Patent Application Number 2000-255957 or Japanese
Patent Application Number 2000 - 024321 described above
15 could be utilized. These diagnostic methods are described
below.

The operation of diagnostic section 41 up to obtaining
the values of the environmental factors is the same as in
the case described above.

20 In this example, diagnostic section 41 refers to
environmental evaluation points range table 47 as shown in
Figure 17 to extract evaluation points for each
environmental factor and calculates the environmental
evaluation points by totaling the evaluation points of each
25 environmental factor.

Environmental evaluation points range table 47 is divided into five classes depending on the value of the environmental factors, and evaluation points are allocated to each class. In this environmental evaluation points range table 47, temperature, humidity, corrosive gases (amount of sulphur-based gases such as SiO_2 or H_2S , amount of nitrogen oxide gases such as NO_2 , amount of chloride gases such as Cl_2 or HCl and amount of NH_3 gas) and sea salt particles (amount of sea salt particles, distance from the coast) are treated as environmental factors that have an effect on the degree of corrosion.

It should be noted that, rather than acquiring environmental evaluation points from the values of environmental factors by utilizing a table as described above, it would be possible to store a function whereby environmental evaluation points are acquired from the values of environmental factors in diagnostic reference database 35c and to use this.

Figure 18 is a view showing an example of a function for calculating environmental evaluation points from values of environmental factors. This Figure 18 shows a polygonal line function that passes through the central values of the classified environmental factors and the evaluation points at these central values, and also an approximation function approximating this polygonal line function.

For example, if the value of a given environmental factor B is x, the evaluation point obtained by using the above environmental evaluation point range table 47 is e_1 , but the evaluation point obtained by using the polygonal line function is e_2 and the evaluation point obtained by the approximation function is e_3 . The evaluation points can be calculated more accurately by utilizing such functions.

Also, environmental evaluation point E could be calculated by an expression (1) by storing weighting coefficients k_i of the evaluation points for each environmental factor i in diagnostic reference database 35c, utilizing these weighting coefficients k_i of the environmental factors i and evaluation values e_i of each environmental factor.

$$E = \sum_{i=1}^n k_i \cdot e_i \quad \text{---(1)}$$

Next, diagnostic section 41 uses the calculated environmental evaluation points to calculate a degradation progress state modeling formula such as, for example, a corrosion weight loss function or corrosion speed function for each type of metal. A metal corrosion weight loss function is a function $W=g(E, d)$ as described above of environmental evaluation points E of the environment in which the equipment to be diagnosed is arranged and the time

d for which it has been arranged therein.

A typical corrosion weight loss function is expressed as a linear expression of the square root of the time d as shown in Figure 19; the coefficient of the linear expression may be described as a polynomial of the environmental evaluation points. Specifically, if the coefficient of the linear expression are respectively taken to be α and β , the metal corrosion weight loss function is expressed by the following expression (2).

$$W = \alpha(E) \cdot \sqrt{d} + \beta(E) \quad \text{---(2)}$$

The terms and coefficients of the polynomials α and β of the environmental evaluation points E are different depending on the type of metal; the terms and coefficients for each metal are stored in diagnostic reference database 35c.

The metal corrosion rate function may be found by differentiating this metal corrosion weight loss function indicated by this expression (2). Specifically, the metal corrosion rate function is $dW/dt = f(E, d) = \alpha(E)^2 / (W - \beta(E))$.

Consequently, diagnostic section 41 can find the corrosion weight loss and corrosion rate from the

environmental evaluation points E and time d and so can infer to what extent corrosion has progressed.

Also, when there is a limit on the corrosion weight loss, the time to reach the limiting value from the current condition i.e. the remaining life can be inferred using the corrosion weight loss function and corrosion rate function.

Also, instead of a degradation progress state modeling formula as described above, by utilizing a degradation progress state master curve, relating the degradation progress state of the metal and the time, for each environmental evaluation point in respect of each of the metals, the time to reach the limit from the current degradation progress state can be found as the remaining life.

Also, the relationship between the amount of corrosion of the metal and the corrosion thickness of this metal of the equipment to be diagnosed is examined at each prescribed time and this relationship is stored beforehand in diagnostic database 8. If this is done, degradation diagnostic function 5c can infer the corrosion thickness of this metal in the equipment to be diagnosed after time t corresponding to the amount of corrosion after time t by using this function.

Also, the corrosion area ratio can be calculated from the amount of corrosion of the metal by using a correlation function of the amount of corrosion of the metal and the

corrosion area ratio of this metal of the equipment to be diagnosed. This correlation function can be found from the time sequence variation curve of the corrosion area ratio of the metal.

5 Also, the corrosion area ratio can be calculated from the corrosion rate of the metal using a correlation function of the corrosion rate of the metal and the corrosion area ratio of this metal of the equipment to be diagnosed.

10 Also, the failure rate of the equipment to be diagnosed can be found using a relationship curve of the failure rate and the amount of corrosion of the metal and a relationship curve of the failure rate and the corrosion area of the metal.

15 Also, the remaining life of the equipment to be diagnosed can be inferred by finding the degree of soiling from the correlation curve of environmental evaluation points of the metal and degree of soiling, using a relationship curve of the time until the equipment to be diagnosed fails and the degree of soiling.

20 When the degradation diagnostic method according to this embodiment as described above is executed, the diagnostic know-how of the diagnostic service providers is published on the Internet and the data needed for degradation diagnosis of equipment or the environment of the
25 equipment is collected by the users themselves. Thus, diagnostic results can easily be obtained by the users

themselves using the published diagnostic know-how and the collected data.

Consequently, the need for on-site data collection by technicians of the diagnostic service provider is eliminated, so the labor costs of the diagnostic service provider, the cost of having technicians on standby and call-out costs can be reduced. Also, the time from the user requesting diagnosis until a diagnostic result is obtained is shortened. Also, if the user merely collects the data, diagnostic results can be obtained with a schedule desired by the user irrespective of the convenience of the diagnostic service provider and the period of diagnosis can thus be matched with the period desired by the user.

Also, by executing the degradation diagnostic method according to this embodiment, the information of the user who desired the diagnosis can be acquired by collecting user information. Also, since access rights (read only/write only/addition-enabled etc.) to the diagnostic database are managed in accordance with the user information, the allowed range of services provided to the user can be managed and security can thereby be increased.

Also, when the degradation diagnostic method according to this embodiment is executed, since information such as the results of previous degradation diagnosis stored in diagnostic database 35 can be shared between users, it is possible to prevent the same or similar diagnoses from being

repeatedly carried out, thereby enabling the efficiency of degradation diagnosis to be increased.

In this embodiment, information for diagnostic purposes based on the respective individual diagnostic know-how of a plurality of diagnostic service providers is registered in diagnostic reference database 35c and, of this registered information for diagnostic purposes, the user selects information for diagnostic purposes that specifies degradation diagnostic processing which the user desires; thus, the user can also execute degradation diagnostic processing based on this selected information for diagnostic purposes.

(Third embodiment)

In this embodiment, business methods are described that are implemented by a degradation diagnostic system 1 described in the second embodiment.

Figure 20 is a block diagram illustrating a first business method executed by degradation diagnostic system 31.

In this first business method, a diagnostic manual is stored beforehand in diagnostic database 35 that is accessed by degradation diagnostic server 34.

When a user makes a request for distribution of an environmental evaluation unit, the diagnostic service provider sells the environmental evaluation unit to this user. When a diagnosis requester requests downloading of a diagnostic manual, the diagnostic manual of diagnostic

database 35 is downloaded to the user client 32 operated by the user from degradation diagnostic server 34 and supplied to the user.

In this first business method, the environmental evaluation unit and diagnostic manual are provided to the user on a chargeable basis. The diagnostic service provider can therefore obtain profit thereby. Also, the diagnostic service provider pays charges to the credit sales company.

A user who purchases an environmental evaluation unit or downloads a diagnostic manual pays the purchase charges to the diagnostic service provider that operates the diagnostic client 33 via the credit sales company's server 36 by operating user client 32.

By operating user client 32, the user inputs data collected using the environmental evaluation unit or diagnostic manual to the home page of the degradation diagnostic server 34 and thereby obtains diagnostic results without charge from the degradation diagnostic server 34.

By executing this first business method, the user can acquire diagnostic know-how (environmental evaluation unit and diagnostic manual) and, by accessing degradation diagnostic server 34 through the Internet, can obtain without charge a diagnostic report, even at a remote location, by inputting the collected data to degradation diagnostic server 34.

Also, the diagnostic service provider can obtain profit by selling the environmental evaluation unit and diagnostic manual.

Figure 21 is a block diagram illustrating a second business method.

This second business method is similar to the first business method described above. However, it differs from the first business method described above in that, with this second business method, the environmental evaluation unit or diagnostic manual is provided to the user without charge. However, this second business method has the characteristic that a user who has obtained diagnostic results from this degradation diagnostic server 34 by inputting to the home page of degradation diagnostic server 34 pays diagnostic service usage fees to the diagnostic service provider through server 36 of the credit sales company.

By executing this second business method, a user can acquire an environmental evaluation unit or diagnostic manual without charge and can obtain a diagnostic report even in a remote location by accessing degradation diagnostic server 34 through the Internet by operating user client 32 and inputting collected data from user client 32 to degradation diagnostic server 34.

Also, the diagnostic service provider can obtain profit by invoicing to the user service usage fees of various types relating to the diagnostic service provided to the user by

degradation diagnostic server 34, diagnostic report preparation service, and diagnostic cases provision service etc.

Figure 22 is a block diagram illustrating a third
5 business method.

When the diagnostic database 35 managed by degradation diagnostic server 34 is upgraded, accompanying this, the diagnostic service provider also upgrades the environmental evaluation unit and diagnostic manual that have already been
10 supplied to the user.

The diagnostic service provider then collects an upgrade service fee through the credit sales company's server 36.

By executing this third business method, a user can
15 acquire an upgraded environmental evaluation unit and diagnostic manual and can obtain a diagnostic report prepared using the upgraded diagnostic database 35.

Also, the diagnostic service provider can obtain profit by supplying an upgraded environmental evaluation unit and
20 diagnostic manual even if an environmental evaluation unit or diagnostic manual has already been provided to the user.

Figure 23 is a block diagram illustrating a fourth business method.

With this fourth business method, the user registers
25 diagnostic results obtained by utilizing the diagnostic

service in the diagnostic database 35 of degradation
diagnostic server 34 and so discloses these to other users.

A user who has registered diagnostic results with
diagnostic database 35 receives through the credit sales
5 company from the diagnostic service provider disclosure
registration fees or diagnostic results purchase fees etc.
Or a user who has registered diagnostic results with
diagnostic database 35 may receive a discount on the
diagnostic service utilization fee.

10 Other users, by selecting "refer to diagnostic cases",
which is one of the items of the diagnostic menu 37, by
operating another user client 48, refer to the diagnostic
results registered in diagnostic database 35 and pay the fee
for referring to these diagnostic results to the diagnostic
15 service provider through the credit sales company.

By executing this fourth business method, a user can
sell diagnostic results that the user has itself obtained to
other users.

Also, other users can infer the state of degradation of
20 equipment to be diagnosed by referring to previously
obtained diagnostic results and so can carry out degradation
diagnosis in an efficient manner since, in some cases, this
can be done simply by utilizing references to these previous
diagnostic cases, without needing to actually execute data
25 collection and/or diagnosis. And other users can easily
request degradation diagnosis.

Also, the diagnostic service provider can augment the diagnostic cases introduction service and so eliminate the waste involved in duplicated diagnosis relating to the same or similar conditions.

5 Figure 24 is a block diagram illustrating a fifth business method.

10 In this fifth business method, the diagnostic service provider undertakes analysis of the environmental evaluation unit provided to the user and notifies the user of the analysis results. The user pays an analysis fee to the diagnostic service provider through the credit sales company.

15 By executing this fifth business method, the diagnostic service provider can obtain a profit not merely from the diagnostic service/diagnostic know-how provided by the degradation diagnostic server 34 but also from the analysis of environmental evaluation units.

Figure 25 is a block diagram illustrating a sixth business method.

20 The diagnostic service provider provides a renewal service (maintenance) comprising component exchange and/or device exchange/device life prolongation measures to the user based on the diagnostic report prepared by the degradation diagnostic server 34. The diagnostic service provider then collects renewal service fees from the users
25 to which the renewal service was provided through the credit sales company.

By executing this sixth business method, the user can acquire an accurate renewal prescription.

Also, the diagnostic service provider can obtain sales resulting from the replacement of components or devices and
5 service fees in respect of renewal services such as washing or coating.

(Fourth embodiment)

In this embodiment, a modified example of the method of degradation diagnosis according to the second and third
10 embodiments is described.

Figure 26 is a view illustrating the layout of a degradation diagnostic system for executing a degradation diagnostic method according to this embodiment.

This degradation diagnostic system 49 is constituted by
15 unifying a user client 50 operated by a user who requests evaluation of the environment in which the equipment is arranged and/or degradation life, a diagnostic client 51 operated by the diagnostic service provider, a degradation diagnostic server 52 that executes degradation diagnostic
20 processing, and a diagnostic database 35 that holds data needed for execution of the diagnosis, by means of an Internet circuit, not shown.

User client 50 is connected with a group of environment sensors 53. User client 50 is equipped with a function of
25 monitoring the atmospheric environment in the vicinity of the equipment by utilizing environmental sensor group 53 and

a function of distributing data obtained by such monitoring to degradation diagnostic server 52.

Diagnostic client 51 reads monitoring data of user client 50 from degradation diagnostic server 52 and outputs
5 this to field environment reproduction means (section) 54.

In field environment reproduction means (section) 54 the atmospheric environment conditions in the field where the equipment to be diagnosed is arranged are reproduced at laboratory level by environmental test tanks and various
10 types of controller. Also, an environmental evaluation unit is exposed to this reproduced environment.

The values of the environmental evaluation items obtained by environmental testing executed by a diagnostic evaluation unit are input to degradation diagnostic 52 by
15 analysis means (section) 55 and diagnostic client 51.

Degradation diagnostic server 52 infers the environmental evaluation points of the equipment environment and/or the degree of degradation/remaining life of the equipment constituent components/materials by using the
20 input data.

Specifically, degradation diagnostic system 49 according to this embodiment is characterized in that remote diagnosis is implemented by reproducing the installation environment of the equipment to be diagnosed at the
25 diagnostic service provider end; other portions thereof can

be identified with the degradation diagnostic system 31 described in the second embodiment.

In the degradation diagnostic mediation server/degradation diagnostic server described in the above
5 embodiments, the arrangement of the various constituents elements can be altered so long as they realize the same action/function and these constituent elements can be freely combined.

Also, the functions of the degradation diagnostic
10 mediation server/degradation diagnostic server described in the above embodiments could be applied to a computer by being written onto a recording medium such as, for example, a magnetic disc (floppy disk or hard disk etc.), optical disc (CD ROM, DVD etc) or semiconductor memory as a program
15 capable of being executed on the computer, or could be applied to a computer by transmission using a communications medium. A computer realizing the above functions executes processing as described above by reading the program recorded on the recording medium, its action being thereby
20 controlled by the program.

In the present invention as described in detail above, a matching degradation diagnostic request handler is selected using the processing execution condition information specified in regard to at least one degradation
25 diagnostic request handler and condition information according to which a diagnosis requester requests

degradation diagnosis. Thus, degradation diagnosis is requested and degradation diagnosis is executed satisfying mutual conditions.

Consequently, mediation can be executed between a
5 diagnosis requester and the diagnostic service provider that executes degradation diagnosis; the diagnostic results required by this diagnosis requester can be presented to the diagnosis requester, and diagnosis requesters desiring such diagnostic service providers can be introduced to a wide
10 range of diagnostic service providers.

Also, by publishing the results of executing degradation diagnosis and sharing the results of executing such degradation diagnosis between a plurality of diagnosis requesters, diagnosis results can be provided at an early
15 stage and degradation diagnosis can be provided at low cost; thus requesting and execution of degradation diagnosis can be made more efficient.

That is, by utilizing the present invention, a service can be implemented whereby degradation diagnosis requested
20 by a diagnosis requester from a diagnostic service provider can be executed rapidly and easily at low cost.

Obviously, numerous additional modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that
25 within the scope of the appended claims, the present

invention may be practiced otherwise than as specially described herein.

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